

# A LIVELY HOPE

## A SERMON

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

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“A reason of the hope that is in you.” 1 Peter 3:15

IN addition to that which we advanced last Lord's day morning upon these words, we have this morning further to notice first, *the liveliness of this hope*; second, *its certainty*; third, *its prospects*; and fourth, *its order*.

First: First we have to notice: *The liveliness of this hope*. It is a lively hope. A lively hope will mean an interested hope; that where there is this living hope, there will be great interest felt in the objects of this hope. And we shall make a few more remarks upon the living creatures to which we referred last Lord's day morning in order to illustrate this point; that they showed great interest in eternal things. I described last Lord's day morning where these living creatures spoken of in Ezekiel came from; and they represent the people of God not in their mortality, not in the world, not in their affairs that are temporal; but represent the people of God in Christ, represent them as led by the Spirit of God, and as taught by the Spirit of God. The representation it is true is very sublime, may appear to some perhaps to be rather too sublime; men, thinking this, have supposed that these living creatures must mean not the saints of God, but angels. But then they must remember that if we view that representation as expressive of what the people of God are by Jesus Christ, then the representation is not at all too sublime, nor at all too high. They are called “living creatures”; this is a term of distinction; angels are never spoken of as living creatures, not in the sense there intended; these are called living creatures because they possess a life which no other creatures in the whole range of existence possess. The Lord Jesus Christ is not the life of angels in the way that he is the life of the church; he is the life of the people of God by his redeeming blood, by being their sanctification, their justification, and their salvation; and also he is their life by their being one with him, joint heirs with him. Here is the great glory, then, in which they are interested; namely, that glory which they have in oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. And if all that is said of these living creatures be tested by these rules, you will find that everything else answers. For instance, it is said, “I heard the noise of their wings, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech.” The wings here are expressive of their progress; and so, in the apostolic age the apostles went forth with wings as eagles, and the Lord went with them; and the sound of their progression was heard in the Gentile world, and is heard in the Gentile world unto this day. And then it is said of these living creatures that the wheels abode by them. The wheels, as I observed last Lord's day morning, will mean the truths of the everlasting Gospel. And when these living creatures stood

still, the wheels abode by them. And just so it is now, when the child of God is come to a stand-still, the truth abides with him in its eternity, and the Christian still abides by the truth in its eternity; that so far from the Christian forsaking the truth when he is brought into a stand-still state, so far from his forsaking the truth in its eternity then, that is the very time above all others that he prizes the blessed truth that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And when these living creatures progressed, then the wheels went beside them; they must get on by the truths of the Gospel; and if we go along today, and leave some of our cares, and some of our troubles, and leave our sins, and leave our adversaries, and leave those things that trouble us generally, if we make a little progress today, it will be by the Gospel, by the truths of the Gospel, by precious faith in him. And so when they were lifted up also, the wheels still abode by them; whether they stood still, or went on, or were lifted up, the wheels still abode by them. And so the Gospel in its eternity came to us in our low estate, when we were at a stand-still; the truth abides by us, and the Lord abides by us by the truth; and when we go forward we go forward by the truth, and the Lord goes with us, he will never leave us nor forsake us; and by and bye, as well as now, when we are lifted up into fellowship with God, it is by the eternal truths of the Gospel; and when we are lifted up into everlasting glory, still the Lord will be with us. The apostle perhaps had his mind somewhat upon this very subject when he said, "We look not at the things that are seen"; for they are so inferior; as though he should say, they are not, comparatively, worthy of our attention; "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen," that so charm the flesh, and that so sway the world, and that so govern men, they are but temporal; but we look at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal. And he assures us in another place, "I reckon," and I am sure his reckoning was right; it is true it was a spiritual reckoning, and it required a spiritual mind to recognize the excellency of that reckoning; he says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us." Thus, then this lively hope is a hope in the blessed God, by the eternity of the truth. And when Ezekiel saw them after many, many trials, he says, "They were the same that I saw by the river Chebar"; in his 10th chapter, after seeing them 10 chapters back, he says, "They were the same faces." And so, it is; you may meet Moses in his young days, and meet him in his old days; and will find it is the same face; he is the same man. And just so now, when the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart of a poor sinner; that sinner perhaps is young in years; meet him in 20, or 30, or 40 years' time, ah, it is the same face; all the alteration is that he loves the truth more, knows his need of it more, knows the value of it more, prizes it more. The same face; they had not changed. And he says, "Their appearances and themselves"; so that they were the same as their appearance. I like that idea of uniting themselves with their appearance; "their appearance and themselves." Men in our days very ingeniously separate themselves from appearances; they appear to be one thing, and are all the time another thing; but it is a poor trade, friends, it won't last long, depend upon it; you will not be always able thus to wear the mask. If your heart be not right in the truth, if you have not come into the truth in the way described at the head of this epistle; namely, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope;" then you will, if begotten by him in this way, you will feel your need of that abundant mercy, that eternal mercy; then your heart will be in the gospel of his mercy, your heart will be in that where mercy and truth meet together, where righteousness and peace embrace each other, your heart will be there believingly, prayerfully, humbly, sincerely, and also most affectionately; you will set your affections upon the blessed God by the eternity of his mercy; and thus while you appear to the saints to have the love of the truth, your conscience will bear you testimony that your appearance and your real character are one and the same; so that you will not

separate the two; you will stand before man and before God, and have the same rejoicing that the apostle and those with him had when he said, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." And there is one thing said of these living creatures remarkable, and it is said of them again, again, and again; that "they went every one straightforward;" they were a straight-forward people. I like that; they went every one straightforward. Now for the people of God always to go straightforward after the flesh, it would be delusion to say such a thing; for the people of God always go straightforward in circumstances as they would like, it would be delusion to say such a thing; for there are many respects in which the people of God may be turned aside in things that are temporal, things pertaining to the flesh. But when they come to the truth of God, they come straightforward; there is a straightforwardness there; because there, in God's truth, they can afford to lose anything and everything, and would be well sustained if called upon to do so for the truth's sake; and it would be impossible for them to lose anything that would have in it one millionth part of the value of that truth for which they suffer, because the most they could lose would be but their life, and that is but a mortal life, a temporal life, and of very little value in comparison of that eternal life that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. "They went every one straightforward." My hearer, it is a great thing in the things of God as well as in other things, but especially in the things of God, to understand where you are, to be kept from turning and twisting about. Now for instance, if you are come rightly into this hope, if your hope be not a dead hope, but a lively hope, a living hope, that you have come to in a way that you will not be able to depart from it, I will tell you what you will sometimes do; at least if you do not do it in the letter, as I am about to suggest, you will in substance. You will say to yourself, well now, here are ten commandments in God's law, and any deviation in the heart from any one of these commandments, however graciously the Lord preserves me in other respects, yet one deviation in the heart, contrary to any one of these commandments, makes me guilty of the whole; you will not find one commandment in all the ten, when you contrast it with what you are in your nature, but you will find in your nature principles, evils, that actually violate every one of these commandments; so that you in your nature you are a daily sinner in the eye of the law, you in your nature are condemned every day in the eye of the law; and that your heart goes on working every day sins against the law; that there is not one out of the ten commandments by which you may not any one day of your life be damned to the lowest hell. You will be conscious of this; you will groan under this, you will mourn under this; you will look with earnestness to Calvary, you will look with sincere longing to God's mercy; you will believe unfeignedly on the Lord Jesus Christ; you will bless God with all your soul that while this is the case with you, it was just the reverse with Jesus; he had not one principle in him that was not in sweet accordance with every one of those commandments. And when we read that not one jot nor one tittle shall fail, all must be made good, ah, then if I am to meet God on these law grounds, I see what the consequence must be; but if Jesus be the end of the law, and I try myself by another rule, then I come to this conclusion, that whatever evil there is in me, there is a good in Jesus to meet that evil; that whatever sin there be in me, there is atonement in Jesus to cover and put away that sin; that whatever bad there is in me, there is excellency in Jesus to put away that bad; and that whatever unrighteousness there is in me, there is a righteousness in Jesus that puts that unrighteousness away, and constitute me righteous even as he is righteous. Ah, it is a lively, interested hope; their appearance and themselves will be the same, and they will go straightforward. I have hinted, though I must not enlarge, that these living creatures are the people of God. I take the four living creatures in Ezekiel to be the same as the four living creatures in Revelation. I did intend to have traced out some of

the analogies, but I will not do so any further than just to observe to you that “living creature” is the term belonging to each; the same term. Our translation very erroneously in Revelation, renders ζῷον by the word “beast;” it ought to have been translated “living creature.” I observed last Lord's-day morning that the living creatures in the 1st chapter of Ezekiel are found in the 43rd chapter of Ezekiel; when the city is revealed, and the final glories of the city opened up to the prophet, there are the living creatures in that city. So, in the book of Revelation, in the 4th and 5th chapters, you have an account of these living creatures and the great interest they had in the loosing of the seals, the opening up of the mysteries of God's mercy and of his judgments. You go on to the 19th chapter, and there you find these same living creatures amid the loud Alleluias, amid the high anthems, and amid the final glories of the everlasting God. And thus, Ezekiel brought his living creatures finally into the city; John brings his living creatures finally into the city; all showing that they point to one and the same thing. And perhaps at some future time I may be favored to point out more clearly wherein we derive all the excellencies attributed to these living creatures; in a word, that we derive them all by oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ; as John says, “As he is, so are we in this world.” I cannot pass from this part without another word upon going straightforward. I want no man to tell me what the Gospel is, nor you either, if you are taught of God; you love to hear the gospel; and when you hear a gospel preached, you can tell from your own soul's experience, connected with God's blessed word, whether it be the Gospel of God or not. Therefore, the going straightforward will mean the man that can go forward in the truth; let him be where he may, amidst whom he may, let him take principle as his guide, he is sure to be safe then. As soon as ever you begin to take persons, let them be who they may, your own minister, or let him be who or what he may, do not take him any more than any other man; for “cursed is the man that trusts in man.” You must not go away and say, Why such a doctrine is true, I am sure, because my minister said so. That would be like the parishioner who went to his church minister and said “I have been among some of those singular sort of people that say except we be born again we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven; and I am come to you, sir, to ask whether there is such a thing as being born again.” “Oh no,” he says, “for I have never experienced it; and you know I am a lawful minister, and I must have experienced it if there had been such a thing;” and so he went away and said, “Well, now I am satisfied that there is no such thing as being born again, for my minister says so; and so John made up his mind to be perfectly happy. So, “cursed is the man that trusts in man.” If you do not live by yourself, you will have to die by yourself. God help you to try yourselves, examine yourselves by his own word; and then you will feel that you know for yourselves, and judge for yourselves, you are independent of all, and that your standing is not upon the testimony of man but upon the testimony of God, and that your hope is not in man, but in the everlasting God; and then you will go straightforward; for however much we love the saints, we must love the truth; we must let God stand first, the truth stand next, and the saints stand next, so that I would rather reject a saint of God for the time being than I would reject the truth; I would rather reject him for the time being, until he has experience enough to bring him to it, than I would reject any one part of God's blessed truth. A lively hope. And especially is this hope lively when it gets near its object; it is amazingly lively then. When the Lord blesses us with nearness to himself, why, it is like the husbandman; he says, since that field was ploughed, and sown, and harrowed, there have been a great many wintry days; the corn laid sometime in the ground, and it has had a great many storms to encounter; but now after the blade, and then the ear, we have now the full corn in the ear; and so he rejoices in the harvest. And just so now; when we are brought near the Lord, when he turns our captivity, then we come rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us; we have been sowing in tears, we have been sowing, and praying, and doubting, and fearing; but

by and bye we are brought near the Lord; we gather in a sweet harvest; we sit down, as it were in plenty and realize the truth of the Lord's own words, "You shall eat in plenty, and shall be satisfied and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, that has dealt wondrously with you." Ah, my hearers, there is not anything can bring such a sweet harvest to our souls, even while we are in this time state, as this living hope that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second. But not only is this hope a lively hope, but there is also *a certainty in it*. We may be far off from the Lord. What should we do without hope? What made Jonah pray while in the whale's belly? It was hope. "I said, I am cast out of your sight." Well, Jonah, it does appear so; you never think of getting out of that whale's belly, do you? Why, you have been there now almost three days and three nights; how can you get out? It is not very likely the whale will carry you safe; how can you get out? And if you do get out, you will be cast into the sea; what hope can there be? Well I am I suppose cast out of your sight. But stop; hope springs up; "Yet will I look again toward your holy temple there is the sacrifice, the burnt-offering, the peace-offering; there the Antitype is typified; "I will look again toward your holy temple." So, my hearer, if your soul be in the belly of hell, and if you are circumstantially as in the belly of hell; and you think if you get out of this present trouble, it is quite possible you may fall into something as bad or worse; ah, never mind; hope will bear you up as an anchor of the soul. "I will look again toward your holy temple." Little do you think, the Lord will hear me, answer and appear for me. But if your hope be right, if you are in your own experience, in the eye of God's law what I have stated, and if religion be not a mere form, a hearsay matter with you, but a matter of personal experience, and if you receive the testimony of the dear Savior as your only nope, with all your heart, he will hear you, he will speak to the whale by and bye; he manages the sea, he will put matters right; and you will want language then, you will feel yourself too little and too weak to express one tenth of what you feel when God shall work, deliverance after deliverance, deliverance after deliverance. Ah, my hearer, there is nothing like having a God to cry to; if we cannot pray to him, to cry to him, to sigh to him, to ruminate and think about him; for God looks on the heart; and where he sees a heart longing after his mercy by faith in his dear Son, there it is the poet's words are true,

"His ear attends the softest call,  
His eyes can never sleep."

There is no comfortable living without this. Ah, well, but say you, I am getting on very well in circumstances; I have no trouble at all. Well, but you might have by and bye, you know; and if you don't want these encouraging words now, perhaps you will before you die. Yes, if you belong to the Lord, you will have your troubles. If you do not need the encouragement that way you will another. There will be much soul darkness; and the enemy will come in upon you like this sometimes, and say, ah, don't you see how matters are? Don't you see that the Lord is giving you your desire, and sending leanness into your soul? Don't you see that while he is bountiful to you as a God of providence, you know nothing of his grace; you will be damned after all; there is no heaven for you beyond this world. Ah, there are a great many doors for Satan to come in at, and he will find a door somewhere, let your position and circumstances be what they may, he will bring in a flood somehow or another; and when that flood shall come, how pleasing then hope will be; then hope will be aa an anchor. Anchor you know is a nautical term; and indicates danger, indicates fear; but then hope is sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the veil. And hence we may be far off from the Lord; and in that far distant state amazingly tossed about. I have often

thought of the 65th Psalm upon this matter, where the Psalmist introduces in a beautiful way the mediation of the Savior; and then represents the people of God, who are brought to receive that mediation, as being very much tried, and being afar off; yet their hope stands by them in that far distant state. "O you that hears prayer, unto you shall all flesh come. Iniquities prevail against us," there is our law state; "As for our transgressions, you shalt purge them away" there is our gospel state. "Blessed is the man whom you choose, and cause to approach unto you, that he may dwell in your courts; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple." Here sin is put away, here peace is established, here the soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness. Ah, but then you must have your trials to come after this. "By terrible things in righteousness will you answer us, O God of our salvation. And so, it is; "by terrible things in righteousness will you answer us, O God of our salvation; who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea." Ah, between you and the Lord there is an ocean of sin and trouble rolling, you are far off; and your hope and your strength sometimes seem perished from the Lord; but hope still holds fast; and presently the dear Savior rises above everything; and some of your Christian characteristics will begin to rise to view; and you will recollect that there are such persons spoken of as the destitute, the poor, the needy, and the outcast; there are such persons spoken of as are driven to their wit's end, that stagger like a drunken man, and that cry unto the Lord. Well, did the Lord deliver them? He did he commanded, and there was a calm. Is there any one instance of the Savior being on the Sea of Tiberias with his disciples in a storm? and several times there were storms, is there any one instance of their crying to him, and he did not overcome the fury of the waves and the winds, and astonish them both at his power, and at his goodness? No, there is not one instance. Ah, this is a sure hope. Human hopes are all uncertain; but, bless the Lord, in this hope there is certainty; he has declared in his blessed word that "He will never leave us nor forsake us."

Third. But I hasten, in the third place, to notice: *The prospects of this hope*. The prospects are beautiful. The apostle describes them, and how we should deal with the prospects of the hope. He would not have us deal lightly with them, legally with them, or presumptuously with them; he would have us in a right mind. He describes them in this way "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind" gird the girdle of truth about you; if you once part with that, matters will go wrong "Be sober;" sober minded. I have no objection to make it mean sober literally. A child of God may even need such an exhortation as that; it is a very awful thing that he should, but when drink once gets the mastery, the taste becomes vitiated, and there is nothing so nice to that taste as that which does you the most harm; whereas if you were to go without it for a month, it would taste so nasty that you would hate it. Thus, I say, a child of God might need such an exhortation as that. But, of course, while we would not exclude that idea from the exhortation, I think the chief thing is sobriety of mind, and that is the best security for the other. "And hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." I think that is a sweet idea, "the grace that is to be brought unto you." Let me tell you, friends, for I might as well be plain with you, that a great many of your trials, and griefs, and troubles, will go with you to the very verge of Jordan; but then Jordan shall be driven back: grace shall come by Jesus Christ, drive the Jordan back, terminate your troubles, and "the righteous has hope in his death." Ah, how sweet the prospect. We may almost imagine some person saying to the prodigal, You are going to your father's house, and you say there is bread enough and to spare; but you had better stop. Let me now give you a word of advice, friend prodigal. You stop a little longer; get a little work to do, and get a good pair of shoes, and get a robe, and then go home respectable; not go in that way, in that condition. What

would you have thought of that person? Why, I cannot imagine the prodigal, meeting with a man who would be a greater enemy to him than that man. Oh, no, he would say, I am reduced to such a state that if I stop till I go to my father's house respectably I shall never go at all; so, I will go just as I am. And he went; and the father saw him a long way off. Here is grace for you! I will take care you shall be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; I will take care there shall be a robe for you, a ring for you, a fatted calf for you, and music and dancing for you, and that you shall be welcome, and that you shall be happy. "Grace that is to be brought unto you." But notice the way in which this grace is to come: "At the revelation of Jesus Christ;" this grace that is needed to bring you into the perfection God has designed is to come by the atonement, the righteousness, the worth and worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We might give many instances in the Bible where the Lord has suited the needed grace to the time, whether for qualification or anything else. Hence the disciples, they needed more grace and more gifts; and in order to fit them to preach successfully the everlasting Gospel, they must tarry in Jerusalem. You see the difference between the Lord making ministers and men making them. He did not say, Well now, there is a college at Jerusalem, and I think you are rather illiterate; and if you will go to that college, do not begin to speak directly, because you cannot speak grammatically, cannot speak splendidly; and if you go to that college, and read such and such an one upon logic, and such and such an one upon rhetoric, and such and such an one upon astronomy, and so go through the sciences, and appear respectable, then you will be an honor to me. Not a syllable about it; they were to tarry at Jerusalem, and to be praying every day, all the time; that was very much better. And so about one hundred and twenty, not many, they abode together, talking of what the Lord had done, and had a prayer meeting from day to day. And even then, they got to a little bit of parson making: Peter said, Well, we are a minister short, and we must manufacture one; let us take two, and then cast lots for one. The Lord had no hand in it; they made a minister of their own; as though the Lord should say, Well, you are very kind, Peter, but I would rather have one of my own making; and by and bye I will make one. And so, after a few months he made Saul of Tarsus. We hear no more of Matthias, the minister that the apostles made; but the one that the Lord made we hear a great deal about; so that one can hardly preach a sermon without thinking of him. So great is the difference between the man-made minister and the God-made minister; the one can have no place in the true churches of the living God, at least not long; the other is sure to have a place therein. And so, when the day came, they had all the grace they needed; for it is said, "Great grace was upon them all."

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Forth: But lastly: *The Order*. The apostle Peter would wish this people to understand that "they were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." Take notice of five things here. First, here is a provision made, "A lamb without spot." Second, here is an appointment, "he was ordained." Third, here is special revelation, "manifest for you, who by him do believe in God;" very different from believing in God by the law, which we do to our dismay; but we believe in God by Jesus Christ to our eternal salvation. "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." So, then your hope is to be in God by the spotless Lamb, by foreordination, by special manifestation, by the resurrection of Christ, and by the glory of Christ. These five things will show the order of your hope. Take away the spotless Lamb, take away God's eternal council, take away the resurrection of Christ, take him from his eternal glory, and then we may despair, but not before.

May the Lord cause us to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now ready. Part first.

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